

**VISN 5 MIRECC Small Grants Program  
for Recovery-Fostering Clinical and Educational Innovations**

**Proposal Submission Guidelines**  
(last updated June 2012)

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The Capital Health Care Network (VISN 5) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC) was formed in 1999 and is one of ten MIRECCs in the Veterans Health Administration, each mandated by Congress to improve the provision of mental health care to veterans through research, education, and clinical activities. The VISN 5 MIRECC focuses on research, training, and services for veterans with serious mental illnesses, especially schizophrenia, and their families.

In early 2005, in response to the VA's Action Agenda to transform VA mental health services to a recovery model, the VISN 5 MIRECC initiated various activities to support and encourage recovery-oriented efforts across the VISN, including this Small Grants program.

### **Purpose of the Small Grants Program**

The purpose of the Small Grants program is to catalyze, through one-year grants, VA clinical innovations and educational projects that foster the development of recovery-oriented mental health services in VISN 5.

### **Recovery-oriented Mental Health Services**

Recovery-oriented mental health services have as their core values that people living with mental illnesses are not defined by their illness and can live rich satisfying lives.

More specifically, such services...

- View the veteran as the center of the process and foster empowerment
- Include the veteran and involved family members as substantial partners in setting goals
- Recognize that recovery is a dynamic process that the veteran pursues over time
- Seek to restore hope and return of function
- Work to maximize meaningfulness and quality of life
- Help the veteran move forward to achieve his/her life goals, in contrast with a focus on only maintenance or stabilization.
- Employ staff who treat the veteran with respect, believe in the veteran as a person with potential, and express hope and optimism for the recovery process.
- Actively work to eliminate stigma related to mental illnesses in their own operations and the larger organization and community.

Therefore, the Small Grants program especially encourages (but is not limited to) proposals for:

- Creating, adopting, launching new recovery-oriented clinical, self-help, or related projects – or expanding existing ones to reach more veterans.
- New programs to educate staff, veterans, and/or family members of veterans with SMI about mental health recovery models, or specific recovery-oriented services/programs.
- One-time purchase of new curricula, training materials, equipment, etc needed to initiate a recovery-oriented clinical or educational innovation.

## **Eligibility & Regulations**

1. Proposals may come from any individual or group (unit or program) within the VA VISN 5 (DC, WV and MD) mental health services, including consumer councils and other VA veteran groups.
2. We encourage applications from all VISN 5 mental health sites.
3. Funding may only be sent to a VA account. Therefore, all proposals and applicants must be formally part of or affiliated with a recognized VA mental health program or unit.
4. All proposals must name a specific individual as the designated contact person.
5. Proposals for research are not accepted. For information on the MIRECC's separate research pilot mechanism, contact Bernie Fischer, M.D. at [Bernard.Fischer@va.gov](mailto:Bernard.Fischer@va.gov) or 410-637-1857 or see [www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/research](http://www.mirecc.va.gov/visn5/research).
6. Proposed projects must abide by all relevant VA and other federal regulations. In our experience, the most commonly relevant ones include:
  - Clear and reasonable justification for the proposed expenditures, including that the need cannot be met by already existing resources.
  - Documentation that all curricula, trainers, consultants, speakers, etc are clearly qualified, available, and otherwise able to fulfill their proposed functions.
  - Federal prohibition on purchasing refreshments for government personnel (staff) with government funds.
  - Federal limitations on purchasing refreshments for VA clients/veterans beyond that which is modest and a minor part of an event.
  - Due to VA administrative regulations, purchasing of equipment that plugs into the VA electrical and/or computer systems takes *months* of processing and delays awarded projects.
  - Depending on the specifics of a given application, other regulations may apply. Applicants are encouraged to consult with their program head and the MIRECC before applying.
7. All proposed projects must have the approval of the person in charge of the relevant program or unit (see letter requirement below)

## **Characteristics of Funded Projects**

Successful applications have been those which proposed projects that are:

- Clearly *innovative* – beyond standard good clinical care
- Clearly *reasonable* – would be easily considered a reasonable way to spend taxpayers' money from the perspective of Veterans, Staff, Members of the public and VA auditors
- Clearly *recovery* fostering – not just generally quality-enhancing or effective
- Clearly *feasible* within the single year of the Award and within the program/unit

Proposals that have been funded in the past include:

- Purchase of new psychosocial, rehabilitation, life skills, or other curricula, accompanied by a clear plan for implementation and ongoing use.
- Purchase of recovery-focused materials to enhance current services (workbooks, educational videos, equipment etc) accompanied by a well-organized plan for their use.
- Expenses for real-life practice of social and societal navigation skills in the community as part of a psychosocial rehabilitation program.
- Transportation expenses for a PRRC program in which Veterans who are clients at the PRRC volunteer at a community nursing home.
- Organizing a day-long service project involving Veterans and community members working together.
- Training Veterans who are clients of a given program to facilitate DRADA support groups at that program.
- Creation of a booklet of Veteran recovery stories and advice to other veterans, to inspire and inform other veterans receiving mental health services.
- WRAP training to establish several staff members as WRAP trainers so they may train staff and veterans to be WRAP group leaders (as well as lead WRAP groups themselves)
- Organizing a recovery-focused educational seminar, workshop, or other event.
- Expenses for Veterans attending a long-term therapeutic group to attend and present at a relevant conference.
- Inviting a well known recovery-focused speaker to educate and inspire veterans, their families, and staff.

Important: these are offered as examples and are not the only types of projects eligible for funding.

## **Application Process**

Award Amounts: Awards amounts can range from \$50 to \$5,000. Most are several hundred to several thousand dollars.

Deadlines: Applications are accepted four times a year: the first of March, June, September, December

Application Details begin on the next page.

To apply please prepare and submit the following:

1. Cover sheet (use the form at the end of this document)
2. Project Proposal. Briefly describe your proposed project using the following sections:
  - a. Introduction/Background: Brief background information for your proposed project. If you feel yours is self explanatory you may omit this section.
  - b. Description: What do you propose to do? Why? How? Who? Where? When? Etc.
  - c. Timeline: What are the steps involved in the project and when will each take place. When will the project be completed? A list, outline, or table is fine here, as is a paragraph. Monies will be available for up to 1 year after award date.
  - d. Relevance to Recovery: How will your project further the recovery model in VA mental health services? How will it benefit the mental health recovery of Veterans receiving mental health services?
  - e. Specific itemized budget: List the actual or estimated costs of all expenses for which you are applying, making sure that their relevance to the project is clear. Be as specific as possible.
  - f. Outcomes: What will be the lasting positive recovery-oriented effects of your project? How will your innovation be sustained beyond this funding? Or, how will its effects last into the future? Will you evaluate or document its outcomes?
  - g. Length Limits: The total proposal must be no more than three pages, single or double spaced, one inch margins, 12 point type (in addition to the cover sheet).

**TIP:** Within the page limits be clear, concise, and complete. Reviewers cannot know what you are proposing unless you are specific. Vague or incomplete proposals will be returned to you un-reviewed for further development and resubmission at the next deadline.

3. A letter approving implementation of your proposed project (if it is funded), from the facility Mental Health Director and/or other relevant VA mental health services administrator(s)

Submission: Please submit all materials attached to a single email message to Dr. Alicia Lucksted at [aluckste@psych.umaryland.edu](mailto:aluckste@psych.umaryland.edu)

**PLEASE NOTE:** Recovery, clinical, and education staff at the MIRECC are glad to help you formulate ideas and craft your proposal. Please contact Dr. Lucksted *prior* to finalizing and submitting your proposal if you wish to talk over ideas, have questions, want feedback, wonder if your budget is appropriate, or want assistance developing your ideas into a proposal. She will gladly provide support and technical assistance and/or connect you with other MIRECC staff who will.

**Alicia Lucksted PhD**

[Aluckste@psych.umaryland.edu](mailto:Aluckste@psych.umaryland.edu) or [Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov](mailto:Alicia.Lucksted@va.gov)  
410/706-3244 or 410/637-1850

## **Review Process**

Each application will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

1. Clarity and completeness of proposal
2. Embodiment and promotion of a recovery model regarding mental illness and mental health services.
3. Appropriateness of the project to the needs, characteristics, and knowledge level and of the target population(s) and the VA setting.
4. Project feasibility and compliance with relevant regulations and procedures
5. Likelihood of and evaluation of lasting impact / effect
6. All awards are subject to the availability of funds

Applicants will be informed of the funding decision regarding their proposal no later than two months after the deadline under which they submitted it.

## **Requirements AFTER Receiving a Small Grant**

Applicants receiving a Small Grant will receive ongoing support and assistance from Dr. Lucksted across the duration of their project. Awardees will also be required to submit a brief progress report via email every 3 months during the period of their funding, to Dr. Lucksted

Awardees must submit a Final Report within three months of their project's completion date, or one year after the date of award, whichever comes first. Final reports must include a copy of any educational or resource materials created during the project, and should be sent to Dr. Lucksted, who will share it with MIRECC management and facility Director of Mental Health.

All resource materials created as part of a project funded by this mechanism (e.g., manual, resource booklet, handouts, publications, etc) and all presentations of such projects must acknowledge support from the "VISN 5 MIRECC Small Grants Program for Recovery-Fostering Educational and Clinical Innovations."

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**APPLICATION COVER SHEET**

<b>1. Descriptive Project Title</b>
<b>2. Principle grant applicant / contact person</b>
a. Name:
b. Unit, Program or Group Affiliation:
c. Preferred email address:
d. Preferred telephone number & extension:
<b>3. Itemized Budget Summary with Total</b>

**For questions or assistance, please contact:  
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